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Reagan Runs Up Against the Real Washington

Headaches over appointments, rivalry among officials, slippery statistics, leaks to the press—the Chief Executive's first four months have not been free of frustration, despite his successes.

Ronald Reagan is learning quickly that nothing—not even widespread acclaim—will spare him the setbacks that every new President suffers when he collides with the realities of Washington politics.

Rarely has a U.S. leader enjoyed so ebullient a honeymoon. Not only has Reagan's economic plan won its crucial first tests in Congress, but his plucky recovery from an attacker's bullet gives him the aura of a national hero.

That the President has endured his share of snags and disappointments, too, has almost been overlooked. Yet, in his first 17 weeks in the White House, the former California governor frequently was forced to adjust his plans to conform with the facts of life in the nation's capital. Among the early lessons Reagan is learning—

- Many issues, particularly in the fields of defense and diplomacy, are more complex than they look to outsiders.
- The federal bureaucracy, with its procedures prescribed by law, cannot easily be changed.
- Differences among top officials seldom remain secret.
- U.S. allies, as well as critics at home, are quick to recognize inconsistencies in American foreign policy.
- Friends and family members sometimes create grief for a President.

Some samples of the difficulties that Reagan and his team have encountered in their early months in office:

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Leaks to the news media plague Reagan, too. Everything from classified intelligence reports to accounts of a spat between Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger has found its way into the press.

The leaks have been so widespread that Vice President Bush considers them the administration's biggest failure. "It's just not good," complains Bush. "It's not seemly. We haven't gotten it together in terms of disciplining ourselves." Atty. Gen. William French Smith issued an edict

that leaks "will not be tolerated," yet they continue unabated. As Bush concedes, "The town thrives on it."

EXCERPTED